

UNHCR ANNUAL TRIPARTITE CONSULTATIONS ON RESETTLEMENT
Geneva 18-19 June 2003

Opening Statement of Non-Governmental Organizations

1. We are pleased to be meeting again together in Geneva to discuss issues related to refugee resettlement. As a focal point for the NGOs to the Annual Tripartite Consultation, the Canadian Council for Refugees would like to offer these opening comments. NGOs are vital partners in the refugee resettlement process, and we are committed to enhancing and promoting resettlement as a durable solution and as an international tool of protection. We are also committed to enhancing the notion that refugees should always be considered as active participants in achieving of durable solutions.
2. The Global Consultations, in which NGOs were key participants, and the adoption of the Agenda for Protection affirmed that resettlement should be discussed as part of broader comprehensive strategies to provide protection and durable solutions. In this context, it is important to emphasize that comprehensive strategies must be refugee-centered and should result in solutions meaningful to refugees. The UNHCR Handbook opens with a warning: “the common description of resettlement as a ‘last resort’ should not be interpreted to mean that there is a hierarchy of solutions and that resettlement is the least valuable or needed of them. For many refugees, resettlement is, in fact, the best – or perhaps, the *only* – alternative.”
3. There are several critical issues we wish to highlight. Firstly, we are once again very concerned that some states continue to insist on the asylum-resettlement linkage. While recognizing there is a relationship between the two issues, it is critical that resettlement not be used as an alternative to asylum. As the NGO paper to the Global Consultations stated, resettlement should not be used as a fig leaf for policies of migration control to enable states to sidestep their international legal obligations to people in need of protection by preventing them from setting foot on their territory. Resettlement must be additional to states' obligations under the 1951 Convention towards refugees who make their own way in search of asylum. It is important to ensure that by achieving better implementation of asylum, resettlement and migration programs and policies, the general public may be assured that these issues are not insurmountable. An example of positive initiatives is the new UNHCR procedures incorporated into the Resettlement Handbook in response to the need to restore the integrity of the resettlement program in East Africa. However achieving improved management does not and should not be at the expense of protecting the rights and entitlements of

refugees. A two-tier system must not be allowed to develop, as it has in some resettlement countries, where those who arrive in an 'unauthorized' manner, even if eventually recognized as refugees, can never enjoy the same rights as people who arrive under the formal resettlement programmes.

4. Additionally, while we applaud the European Union's stated interest in resettlement, we remain gravely concerned about EU proposals for transit processing centers and the creation of Zones of Protection in regions of origin. We encourage UNHCR to engage the Resettlement Section of the Department of International Protection, the Working Group on Resettlement and the NGOs in this dialogue which is currently being held behind closed doors at the Intergovernmental Consultation Group with UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration.
5. The Agenda for Protection identifies NGOs as important partners in refugee resettlement; however NGOs were excluded from the discussion on the strategic use of resettlement at the Working Group Meeting last March and we are deeply disappointed that NGOs have not been able to contribute to the development of the Working Group Paper being brought to the Standing Committee and the High Commissioner's Forum. We wish to emphasize NGOs continued strong interest in greater participation in this dialogue and request inclusion in the future activity of the Working Group on this issue, and more immediately, as the Working Group continues its task to examine selection criteria in mass displacement situations.
6. We are concerned over the diminished commitment of some resettlement countries to meet their resettlement targets and absorption capacity, (notably shortfalls in the United States and likely shortfalls in Canada). We welcome new resettlement countries, but collectively we are far behind as the same time traditional resettlement countries are reducing their numbers. It is our hope that the upcoming High Commissioner's Forum on Resettlement will be a venue for increasing national, and therefore, global resettlement capacity.
7. We appreciate that some states have recognized the importance of information sharing and collaboration on integration issues as one means of strengthening the resettlement program and have offered support to the proposal by the Canadian Council for Refugees for a pilot project in this area. The information gleaned through the pilot project on needs, opportunities and potential partnerships will stimulate exchanges between traditional, new and emerging resettlement countries and provide recommendations to the ATC on future initiatives.